

Revision guide on Religious Attitudes to Drug Abuse

Section 1 - What is a drug? Examples and effects of legal drugs, including the social drugs of alcohol and tobacco.

1) *What is a **drug**?*

A **drug** is a substance which when introduced into the body causes a **chemical reaction** in the brain which often, but not always, brings about a change in mood.



2) *What does the law say about drugs?*

There are very many different kinds of drugs some of which are **legal** (not against the law), and some of which are **illegal** (against the law).

3) *What kind of drugs are legal?*

Legal drugs fall into two main categories: **medical drugs** and some **recreational drugs**.

4) *What is a medical drug?*

A medical drug is a drug which is taken with the sole purpose of treating a medical condition. Some medical drugs can be bought over the counter at a chemist, for example, aspirin which can be taken to cure headaches. Other medical drugs may need a prescription from a doctor before they can be obtained, for example, antibiotics which can fight infections. Other medical drugs are only allowed to be administered by a doctor or a trained medical practitioner, for example, **morphine** which is used to relieve extreme pain. Christians would support the use of medical drugs because their prime function is to improve health.

5) *What is a recreational drug?*

A recreational drug is a drug which is taken for non-medical reasons. The primary reason for taking a recreational drug is because the drug taker finds the experience enjoyable i.e. it gives them a buzz.

6) *What are the main recreational drugs which are legal?*

Caffeine is a drug that is consumed daily by most people without great harm. It is found in tea, coffee and many soft drinks. It is a mild **stimulant** which has the effect of waking people up. The two legal recreational drugs which can have serious physical and social consequences are **alcohol** and **tobacco**. Both these drugs can be **physically addictive**. Nicotine and tobacco are classed as **social drugs**.



7) *What is a social drug?*

A **social drug** is one which is legal, although a license is required to sell them and their sale is age restricted. An individual has to be over 18 to buy tobacco products and over 18 to buy alcohol in a pub. However, to buy alcohol in an Off license or a supermarket you need to be over 21 and sometimes over 25. These higher age restrictions are placed on alcohol to try to cut down on the problem of binge drinking. Do you think that these age restrictions are effective? Should they be higher or lower?

8) *Are alcohol and tobacco the only dangerous legal drugs?*

No. Some people (particularly young people) inhale or sniff some solvents such as glue and lighter fuels. The effects of taking solvents is an immediate high, however, the physical effects can be very dangerous including liver damage, kidney damage and heart failure. There have been many reported deaths associated with solvent abuse.

9) *What is a physically addictive drug?*

Physical addiction is when a drug user suffers unpleasant physical symptoms if they do not have access to their drug. This can be an overpowering craving, as in the case of cigarette addiction, or serious physical symptoms like fever and stomach cramps in the case of crack cocaine (remember Nicola trying to give up crack in Crack House – BBC TV 2003)

10) *What are some of the physical and social consequences of alcohol?*

Alcohol affects a person's judgement, reduces their inhibitions and slows their reflexes. It can help people to relax and for many is an enjoyable experience. However, when alcohol is taken to excess it results in the following serious consequences.

- Industry loses £2 billion a year and 10 million working days through the after-effects of drinking.
- Drinking costs the National Health Service about £200 million a year.
- Alcohol is a major factor in some 30,000 deaths a year in the UK. 20% of all road accidents are caused by drink-driving.
- 10% of all drinkers develop a serious drinking problem which can in some cases lead to alcoholism (physical addiction to alcohol). Remember the case study of Tony (Booze - BBC TV 2003) the computer expert who admitted that he was close to death because of alcohol addiction. He went to a drying out clinic and was eventually able to stop drinking.
- Alcoholics and heavy drinkers run the risk of developing **cirrhosis** of the liver and other serious health problems.
- Over half of all domestic violence, including wife and child beating, are committed by people who have been drinking.
- It has been medically proven that teenage binge drinking can stunt the development of parts of the brain making it more difficult for teenagers to remember things and solve problems which will impact on their education and career prospects.



11) *What are some of the physical and social consequences of tobacco?*

- Around 30% of people smoke in the UK. The pleasurable element in smoking is the drug **nicotine** which is just as **addictive** as heroin!
- Smoking tobacco is the largest preventable cause of death in the UK. 120,000 people die in the UK each year as a result of smoking.
- Smoking can cause many cancers, especially lung cancer, it can cause chronic chest infections and it can cause heart disease as well as strokes.
- Breathing in other people's smoke (passive smoking) can cause lung cancer and eye, nose and throat irritations.
- More than 17,000 children under the age of five are admitted to hospital every year due to passive smoking.
- Smoking when pregnant can have very harmful effects on the baby.
- Smoking costs the National Health Service over £400 million pounds a year.

12) *If alcohol and tobacco have such serious physical and social consequences, isn't there a case for making them illegal?*

These two drugs in our society are **socially acceptable** up to a point and so are perceived by many as been less dangerous than some illegal drugs. Although it might be argued by many that cannabis is less harmful than alcohol. Alcohol is part of our culture and is taken without shame by most adults in the UK.

If alcohol and tobacco were outlawed it would force the distribution of these drugs into the hands of criminals. The problem would simply go underground.

Both alcohol and tobacco are very heavily taxed by the UK government, and some argue that this is the best way to deter people – by making them more expensive. Remember that there are many responsible people who enjoy having a drink but do not become problem drinkers, why should they be penalised if alcohol was made illegal?

Note that current UK excise duty (tax) on tobacco products is about 80% while on most alcohol products it is 70%. Do you agree with this? Does high tax deter particularly young people from binge drinking? Does it help pay for the damage both socially and physically that alcohol and tobacco do? Or are we living in a nanny state? In many European countries tax is much lower and they don't have a problem with binge drinking.

13) *How much money does the U.K. government make on the high duty (tax) on the social drugs of alcohol and tobacco?*

In 2007, health problems caused by alcohol and tobacco cost the NHS (National Health Service) around £5 billion, however, the total duty raised by the government on these products was £8 billion. So the government actually seem to be making a profit on the tax on these products. The extra £3 billion raised helped to fund other areas of public spending, for example, education. Do you think that this is right? Is the government making too much money on the sale of alcohol and tobacco?

Remember that the duty on cider is lower than most other alcoholic drinks and cider is a favourite tippie of many teenage binge drinkers.

Section 2 - Examples and effects of illegal drugs

14) *How do we know which are the most harmful illegal drugs?*

The Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) divides illegal drugs into classes. **Class A or hard drugs** are the most serious and **Class B and C or soft drugs** are less serious.

15) *What are the main types of Class A drugs?*

- **Cocaine (coke)** is a white powder which is usually snorted up the nose. It is a powerful stimulant which can make people feel extremely positive and confident. It can damage the inside of the nose and heavy use can result in heart disease.
- **Crack (rock)** is a pure smokeable form of cocaine which gives an intense but short high. It is highly addictive and can cause convulsions and heart problems. Case study: Crackhouse (BBC TV 2003).
- **Heroin (smack)** is usually smoked, snorted or injected. It gives a feeling of warmth and well-being. It is highly addictive and when injected can lead to the spread of HIV and hepatitis.
- **Ecstasy (E)** is a tablet which gives a feeling of **euphoria** (intense happiness) and increases energy. It is often taken by clubbers. Constant use can result in kidney and liver problems. Some users die through **dehydration** (lack of water in the system).

16) *What about softer drugs?*

The most widely used 'soft' drug is **cannabis** which has recently been reclassified from a Class C drug to a Class B drug. It is smoked and gives a feeling of well-being and relaxation. Recent studies indicate that regular use of cannabis increases the risk of the mental illness called **psychosis**.



17) *What is psychosis?*

Psychosis is a mental illness where the sufferer becomes detached from reality. They may hear voices and become paranoid which means they believe that they are being

persecuted by people. Severe psychosis means that some one cannot function in society and may have to be admitted to a mental institution.

18) *What are some of the main reasons that people take drugs?*

- To escape from worries or the boredom of life.
- To experiment and find out what it is like.
- Because they enjoy it.
- Peer pressure – because friends are taking drugs they do not want to feel left out.
- To show rebellion or to be different. Many young people want to do something they know would outrage their parents.
- Addiction – people are physically dependent on a drug and find it almost impossible to stop taking it.

19) *What about drugs in sport?*

The use of **performance enhancing drugs** has become a very important issue in sport. The reason they are banned is because it is considered unfair for one competitor to have an advantage over another competitor in a competition. The International Olympic Committee has banned over 4,000 drugs. One of the most dangerous performance enhancing drugs is **anabolic steroids** which increase body bulk and strength. These can have serious long term consequences including increased risk of heart disease and even death.



Lance Armstrong is one of the most famous sports stars who has been disqualified due to the use of performance enhancing drugs. He has been stripped of most of his cycling medals including the Tour de France.

Some people argue that sport is all about fairness and honour and the use of performance enhancing drugs clearly undermines this with stars like Lance Armstrong being a bad example to young people.

Christians would generally be against the use of performance enhancing drugs. Christians believe that our bodies are ‘Temples of the Holy Spirit’ and because Anabolic Steroids can cause physical and mental harm this would be seen as a sin against God. Performance enhancing drugs is also cheating so Christians would view it as being not only dishonest to our fellow humans but also to God.

Section 3 - Should any illegal drugs be made legal?

20) *If alcohol and tobacco are legal, isn't there a case for decriminalising all drugs? Surely it is up to the individual to decide for himself or herself and not for society to dictate what people can and can't do with their own bodies.*

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights says that every citizen of the world should have **autonomy** (freedom) over their own bodies. Some people who want to **decriminalise** some or all drugs say that in a truly free society individuals should have the freedom to take drugs because it is a personal decision and is not up to the government. They argue that if the government tells us what drugs we can and can't use then we are living in a **nanny state**.

21) *What is a nanny state?*

A nanny is someone who looks after small children and tells them what they can and can't do. So if a government has too much power over its citizens and tells them what they can and can't do then it is called a nanny state. People who want drugs decriminalized claim that we are living in a nanny state.

If you get a question about the legalization of drugs in the exam then you must make a distinction between different types of drugs, for example, the social and physical effects of cannabis are completely different to those of crack cocaine.

Some points to consider:

- Portugal has decriminalised all drugs. In other words, although it remains illegal to sell certain drugs in Portugal, addicts and users are not arrested but instead are referred for treatment and not for punishment.
- Look at the physical and social effects of crack cocaine. In the TV documentary Crackhouse (BBC TV 2003), Carl John, a former crack addict, returns to Toxteth to make a documentary on the effects of crack addiction. The physical effects of crack are very disturbing: Nicky, a prostitute, at one point tries to give up crack cocaine and goes through a few days of **cold turkey** where she experiences severe stomach cramps and depression. She does manage to give up although we are informed by the end of the documentary that she has returned to being an addict. Drug addiction puts enormous strain on the National Health Service through the treatment of addicts.
- The social effects of crack affect both the addicts and society as a whole. Nicky has lost custody of her nine-year old son because of her addiction. Her relationship with her mother is also under strain. Virginia has lost two children who have been taken into care. The baby born during the making of the documentary is also taken into care. Remember that the baby is born showing the effects of crack addiction. Because both women are working as prostitutes to fund their drug habit forming a lasting stable relationship with a boyfriend would be extremely difficult. Think about the effects on society as a whole – working as prostitutes might help spread sexually transmitted diseases. Nicky also shop lifts to fund her drug habit. Virginia's 'boyfriend' is arrested for theft to help fund his crack habit. Even if crack cocaine could be bought legally and not from criminal dealers it is highly unlikely that this would alter the lifestyles of the people in this

documentary. Should there be more done to educate people about the dangers of crack? Would legalizing Class A drugs help crack addicts?

- Contrast crack against a softer drug like cannabis. There are many people who would be appalled to see crack legalised but would be quite happy for cannabis to be legalised. What do you think?



- A high ranking police officer, Police Chief Mike Barton, has recently recommended that some Class A drugs be legalized in the UK. He said that a typical Class A drug addict steals £45,000 worth of goods each year as well as keeping criminal drug gangs in business. He claims that more harm is done by keeping some drugs illegal. He argues that if

Class A drugs were available through the NHS then drug takers would not get the contaminated drugs that they currently get from drug dealers and also crime would drastically be reduced as most U.K. prisoners are in prison for drug related crimes.



Arguments for legalising cannabis

- It helps people to relax. Unlike alcohol it rarely makes people violent.
- It is not physically addictive although people can become psychologically addicted.
- Cannabis is used by some people for effective pain relief. Some Multiple Sclerosis, Motor Neuron Disease sufferers take it.
- The police waste a lot of time prosecuting people who use a largely harmless drug for their own use.
- Cannabis is legal in Holland yet the UK still has a more serious hard drugs problem than Holland.

Arguments against legalising cannabis

- Just because cannabis is a soft drug does not make it right. It would send a confusing message to young people and would undermine anti-drug legislation.
- Many people would be encouraged to experiment with harder drugs so cannabis might be seen as a gateway drug to more harmful drugs like heroin.

- All drugs are dangerous and carry health risks. It is now believed that cannabis can cause cancer and lead to mental illness such as psychosis.

Remember that 95% of people who take class A drugs do not develop a serious drug problem – is this an argument for legalizing most if not all drugs?



Some high profile celebrities have admitted to taking class A drugs. Is the taking of class A drugs a matter of personal autonomy (freedom)?

Section 4 - Religious responses to the use of drugs

Both Christians and Muslims have strong beliefs about how humans should look after their bodies and minds. Our minds should not be abused through drugs (including alcohol abuse) because it is through our minds that we relate not only to our fellow human beings but also to God in worship; so drug abuse is a direct sin against God.

22) What are Christian attitudes to alcohol?

Jesus himself would certainly have drunk alcohol. The central act of Christian worship, **Holy Communion**, includes the drinking of wine. Today churches use non-alcoholic wine but the first Christians would have used alcoholic wine. St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:23 'Do not drink water only, but take a little wine to help your digestion.' Christians regard their bodies as '**temples of the Holy Spirit**' (St. Paul) which do not really belong to themselves but belong to God. St. Paul commanded Christians to 'honour God in your body.' So while the New Testament does not condemn alcohol it does make it clear that if our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit it is hardly fitting if we get blind drunk. Therefore most Christians would regard alcohol abuse as a sin against God. Most Christians today would not have a problem with moderate drinking. Two Christian denominations who have traditionally taken a strong stance against alcohol are **The Methodists and The Salvation Army**. The Methodist Church traditionally insists that its ministers are **teetotal** (that they never drink alcohol) to set a good example to the rest of the congregation. Today members of The Salvation Army continue to '**sign the pledge**' which means making a promise to remain teetotal and not to smoke either.

23) *What are Muslim attitudes to alcohol?*

In 7th Century Arabia Prophet Muhammad saw for himself the great harm that alcohol abuse had on individuals, families and society. The Qur'an states "They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say 'In them is a great sin' ". Today alcohol is considered to be **haram** (forbidden by Allah) and is therefore not taken by the vast majority of Muslims. In countries like Saudi Arabia who adhere to extreme **Shariah law** (law taken directly from the Qur'an and early Muslim writings - which was designed for a 7th Century tribal desert society) alcohol consumption can be punished by a public flogging.



24) *What are Christian attitudes to hard drugs?*

If our bodies are **temples of the Holy Spirit** then it is clearly a sin to abuse our bodies by taking hard drugs. Christians believe in the sanctity of human life i.e. all human life is **sacred**: in Genesis it states that 'God created human beings in His own image' therefore we are God's **representatives** on earth so to damage ourselves both spiritually and physically is to **dishonour** God. Our bodies and minds are a gift from God and so we should be good **stewards** or care takers of our own bodies and minds. Many Christians would say that people turn to drugs because they are **spiritually empty** – they have a **God-shaped hole** in their lives which they try to fill with drugs. Christians would be very concerned at the social and physical damage that hard drugs inflict (case study – Crack House BBC TV 2003). Christians look to the life and teachings of Jesus as an example of how to live. Jesus rarely condemned sinners rather he encouraged them to repent because we have **loving** and **forgiving** God who showed **compassion** to his creatures.



The parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32) tells the story of a son who is so deep in sin that he believes that it is impossible to be **reconciled** to his father (who represents God). His father does forgive him and accepts him back because the son had repented (said sorry and asked forgiveness for his sins). If we apply this story to the subject of drug abuse then the Lost Son might represent a crack addict as seen in the documentary Crack House. So Christians should not be judgmental and condemn people with a drug problem, rather they should express God's love by showing compassion and understanding

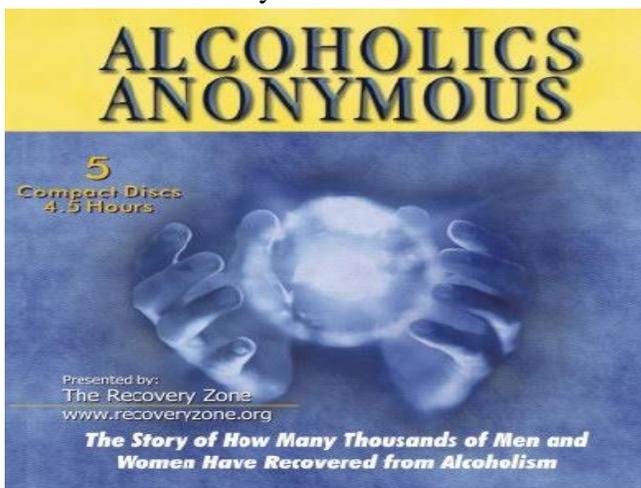
as well as encouraging drug victims to repent. In Mark 2:17 Jesus says *'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners'*. So if Christians want to follow Jesus' example then they will not ignore the problems caused by drug abuse, but rather actively do all they can to help those who are drug victims. If Jesus were physically present in Britain today it is quite likely that he would be mixing with the kinds of people shown in the Crack House documentary. By helping people in need like drug addicts, Christians believe they are serving Jesus, who said: *'Anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me'* Matthew 25:40. In other words if Christians help the victims of drug abuse they are not only doing it for the drug victim but they are also serving Jesus. Remember that Christians would have no problem with medical drugs because they are used to improve the quality of human life.

25) *How might Christians show compassion towards victims of drug abuse?*

A Christian might actively become involved with organizations supporting **drug rehabilitation** or they might contribute money to charities who help in **drug rehabilitation**.

26) *What is drug rehabilitation?*

Drug rehabilitation means that a drug addict goes through a course of treatment which aims to cure them of their addiction. We saw Nicola go to a drug rehabilitation centre in the documentary Crackhouse. **Alcoholics Anonymous** is an organization which



treats people with alcohol addiction. There are regular meetings where alcoholics confess to other alcoholics that they are alcohol dependent. So as well as meeting with trained counselors they are also supported in their personal struggle with alcohol addiction by other alcoholics.

Alcoholics Anonymous was founded by Christians who wanted

to help victims of alcohol by getting them to believe in a higher power which could help break their addiction. Although **Alcoholics Anonymous** was founded by Christians anyone seeking help from **Alcoholics Anonymous** is not required to be a Christian or even believe in God.

Another organization which helps rehabilitate drug addicts is **U.K. Drug Rehab.**

27) *What are Muslim attitudes to hard drugs?*

As in Christianity, Muslims believe that human life is sacred and ultimately belongs to Allah. They would therefore condemn the use of substances which have harmful physical and social effects – ‘Do not make your own hands contribute to your own destruction’ The Qur’an. Any substance which intoxicates (clouds mental ability) is known in Arabic as **khamr** and is forbidden to Muslims because it prevents a person from using their reason and making clear decisions. ‘Intoxicants are the lure of Satan; if you wish to prosper you must keep away from these things’ The Qur’an. It is worth noting that although smoking is not condemned in Islam it is not encouraged by many Muslims who are aware of the physical damage it can cause.



Also revise the printed list of important quotes relating to drug abuse you have stick in your exercise books.